



Hope in Troubled Times

by Pastor Alan Felton

Bob Dylan won the Academy Award for Best Original Song in 2001 for writing “Things Have Changed.” Dylan’s chorus begins, “People are crazy, and times are strange.” Nearly a quarter of a century later, we continue to live in strange times, where people do all sorts of things we consider crazy. Sometimes even our own actions surprise us. Anxiety is growing. Worry is frequently the order of the day. The only thing that seems certain is uncertainty.

Perhaps the world has always been this way. An awful national civil war, a great depression, and two cataclysmic world wars made life frightening and tenuous in earlier

days. Somehow, those who lived in such times made it through—often ending up stronger than they had been before. Yet we look at those times through a rearview mirror, knowing how everything worked out. This gives us a certainty that our ancestors did not have in those turbulent moments.

One day, our great-great-grandchildren will look back at 2025 and discover things about these times that we do not realize now. The outcome of many perplexing events will be well known by then, and the worry we currently feel will evade those who study history. How interesting it would be to see today with the perspective gained after fifty or a hundred years!

We, of course, don’t have such perspective today. Caught in the middle of quickly changing events, all we can do is worriedly wonder how things will work out. This worry leaves us feeling brittle. The Rev. Dr. Lisa Cressman says individuals and

institutions become “brittle” when exposed to constant stress and nervousness.

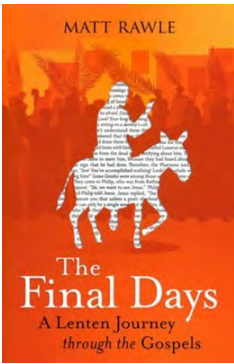
Brittleness makes us vulnerable. Fear takes over. We don’t always make good decisions when we are feeling brittle. We tend to shrink rather than grow. We hoard instead of being generous. We allow events to drive us rather than seeking to mold the times in which we live. If we let the feeling of brittleness persist for too long, we might even lose hope.

However, even if people are crazy and times are strange—and even without the perspective that those in the future will have—we do have enduring hope in Christ. This is not some naïve belief that everything will work out in a magical way, but faith in Christ helps us not to become brittle amid so much worry. Faith gives us the assurance of hope. The Apostle Paul provides good encouragement, writing, “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer” (Romans 12:12).



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facebook.com/bensonmemorialumc/ | instagram.com/bensonmemorialumc/



Join Our Bible Study!

The Final Days: ***A Lenten Journey through the Gospels*** by Matt Rawle

taught by Pastor Alan Felton

**Wednesdays at 6:45 p.m. and
Thursdays at 10 a.m.**

Continues through April 9

Lent is a time for careful examination and humble reflection. One of the ways we engage in self-examination is through the study of Scripture. Reading the Holy Word brings us closer to God and prepares us for Easter. *The Final Days*, written by Matt Rawle, leads participants through a study of Jesus' Passion as recounted in the four Gospels. Each one offers slightly different insights and revelations about Jesus' journey to the cross. These differing accounts don't diminish the truth of Jesus but instead reveal it in more detail and with important nuance.

You're Invited!

FINANCE TOWN HALL MEETING

**Sunday, March 23
10:00 to 10:45 a.m.
Fellowship Hall**

We will discuss the 2024 financial results along with the 2025 budget. Please attend and bring your questions.

Call for Nominations: Lay Equalization Plan for Annual Conference

In 2021, our annual conference adopted a [Lay Equalization Plan](#) to guide the nomination and selection process for at-large lay members to our Annual Conference. The purpose of this plan is to ensure an equal number of clergy—both active and retired—and lay members participate and vote in our NC Annual Conference. This plan calls for the district superintendent, in partnership with the district lay leader(s), to nominate professing members from within their district as at-large members for participation in the NC Annual Conference meeting.

From now until March 28, we are actively receiving Lay Equalization Plan nominations. Nominees may be submitted by pastors, congregational lay leadership, or through self-nomination. You may also submit a nomination on behalf of someone else if you have spoken with them and they would like to be considered.

You are welcome to submit more than one nomination. Remember, this is a nomination in addition to the name(s) you have already elected at your annual Charge

Conference. All nominations will be reviewed by our Conference Board of Laity, and all nominees will be notified by April 12, 2025, regarding their status—either elected or alternate.

**Please [submit all nominations](#) by
11:59 p.m. on March 28.**

We encourage you to share the nomination form with anyone who might be interested in serving. We ask both pastors and laity to help us seek, encourage, and ultimately send lay members of every age, gender, and ethnicity to Annual Conference as we work together for our conference and for the glory of our Savior.

Please note that elected lay members will be responsible for their own travel arrangements and accommodations. There is no funding available from the district or conference for travel, meals, or lodging. College Hill Suites at East Carolina University offers very affordable lodging for lay members attending Annual Conference. Housing information and Annual

Conference 2025 details will be available online starting Thursday, March 6.

We are seeking committed and willing hearts to serve as at-large members to Annual Conference. Thank you in advance for helping us ensure that our decision-making members are as creative and diverse as the God who created us all!

—John Hall, NC Conference Lay Leader



THE 40 DAYS OF LENT



A SEASON FOR EXPERIENCING GOD UP CLOSE

We often have difficulty slowing down. Our lives are full of busyness. We are on our phones or other devices almost constantly. We rarely find an opportunity to “unplug.” The culture around us tells us that the busier we are, the more success we achieve. And, on the rare chance we do take a break, we often are left feeling guilty about it or, at least nagged by a sense of being left out and falling behind.

Somewhere along the way, we can easily lose touch with God. Yes, God remains present even if we don’t notice, but our inattention to the divine presence will eventually leave us feeling worn out and empty. All of our activities and the many achievements we say we enjoy begin to be unsatisfying. We sense something is missing. But what?

The season of Lent gives us opportunities for self-examination, prayer, reading the Bible, and fasting. We learn our limitations during Lent. Realizing that “we came from dust and to dust we shall return” humbles us so that we move closer toward God. As we continue the journey, our lives stop being filled with busyness that drains us and instead opens us to the possibilities that God offers us.

Our Lenten calendar provides ways to help you focus on scripture reading and prayers during the weeks ahead. We will also have a “Sunday Service Opportunity” that you can do at home and then bring to the church each week. The purpose of this calendar is not to replace one way of busyness with another but instead to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us during this season as we together draw close to God.

One way to do this is by using the calendar found at this link: bensofmemorialumc.org/lenf/.

Here is a resource that focuses our self-examination through scripture reading, prayers, spiritual reflections, and mission opportunities. The purpose of this calendar is not to fill your time with busyness but to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us during this holy season.

[DOWNLOAD THE PDF CALENDAR](#)

THE 40 DAYS OF LENT

A SEASON FOR EXPERIENCING GOD UP CLOSE

We invite you to use this calendar to deepen your spiritual journey during this Lenten season. It includes readings and reflections, and actions you can take to give to our community as God has given to you. Each Sunday we will have a service project for you to participate in as a way to show God's love to others. Full details on these projects and daily reflections can be found on our website at bensofmemorialumc.org/lenf/.

MARCH 5 ASH WEDNESDAY Reading: Psalm 51 Meager Meal: 5:45 p.m. FH Worship Services: Noon & 7 p.m.	MARCH 6 Reading: Psalm 5 Service Opportunity for next Sunday: Make an encouraging card(s) for a "mom-to-be" at the women's prison. Drop them off at the church.	MARCH 7 Reading: Psalm 25	MARCH 8 Saturday's Selah (Based on Psalm 25) See today's reflection here.
MARCH 9 SUNDAY SERVICE PROJECT: CARDS FOR MOMS-TO-BE Bring to church your cards for the moms-to-be at the women's prison.	MARCH 10 Service Opportunity for next Sunday: Collection for Family Promise of the Triangle Cleaning supplies and mattress covers are high on the list!	MARCH 11 Prayer Practice: Play using Lectio Divina—reading, meditating, praying, contemplating. Learn more here.	MARCH 12 Reading: Psalm 23
MARCH 13 Weekly Wisdom (Inspirational quote by Howard Thurman) Read it here.	MARCH 14 Reading: Psalm 34	MARCH 15 Saturday's Selah (Based on Psalm 34) See today's reflection here.	

THE 40 DAYS OF LENT



SUNDAY SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Every Sunday during the season of Lent, there will be a special opportunity for you to serve. There's something for everyone and for all ages, and you can decide to do one, a few, or all of them—it's completely up to you. Check out the information below to see how you would like to serve. If you have any questions, contact our [Minister of Families and Outreach, Cortney Babajtis](#). And as always, take pictures and tag us on Facebook or Instagram. Use @bensonmemorialumc and #bensonmemorialumc to tag us on social media when sharing your experiences!

Sunday, March 16: Collection for Family Promise of the Triangle

We are collecting essential items to support Family Promise of the Triangle, an organization that helps families experiencing homelessness find stability and housing. Their current needs include twin and queen bedbug mattress covers, bleach cleaners, and Fabuloso. These items help ensure that families have a clean and safe environment. Please bring your donations to the narthex on Sunday, March 16, or the church office during office hours (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Mon.–Thurs.).

Sunday, March 23: Cards for Springmoor Life Care Retirement Center Residents

During the week, spend some time creating an encouraging card(s) for a resident at Springmoor Life Care Retirement Community. Need supplies? We've got you covered! Just come to the narthex the Sunday before (3/16) and pick up any materials you need. Bring your completed card(s) to the narthex on Sunday, March 23, or the church office during office hours (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Mon.–Thurs.).

Sunday, March 30: Clothing Drive for Jeffreys Grove Elementary School

Many children at our partner school lack access to well-fitting, weather-appropriate clothing and shoes. By donating new or gently worn items, we can help ensure that every child feels comfortable, confident, and ready to learn. We are collecting children's clothing (sizes 4T–14), and children's tennis shoes of all sizes. All donations should be in good condition—clean, gently worn, or new. Bring your donations to the narthex on Sunday, March 30, or the church office during office hours (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Mon.–Thurs.).

Sunday, April 6: Donations for North Raleigh Ministries

Check out this list to see the currently most needed items for the pantry: northraleighministries.com/pantry-donations/. Bring your donations to the narthex on Sunday, April 6, or the church office during office hours (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Mon.–Thurs.).

These service opportunities and more Lenten ideas are listed at www.BensonMemorialUMC.org/Lent/. Visit today!

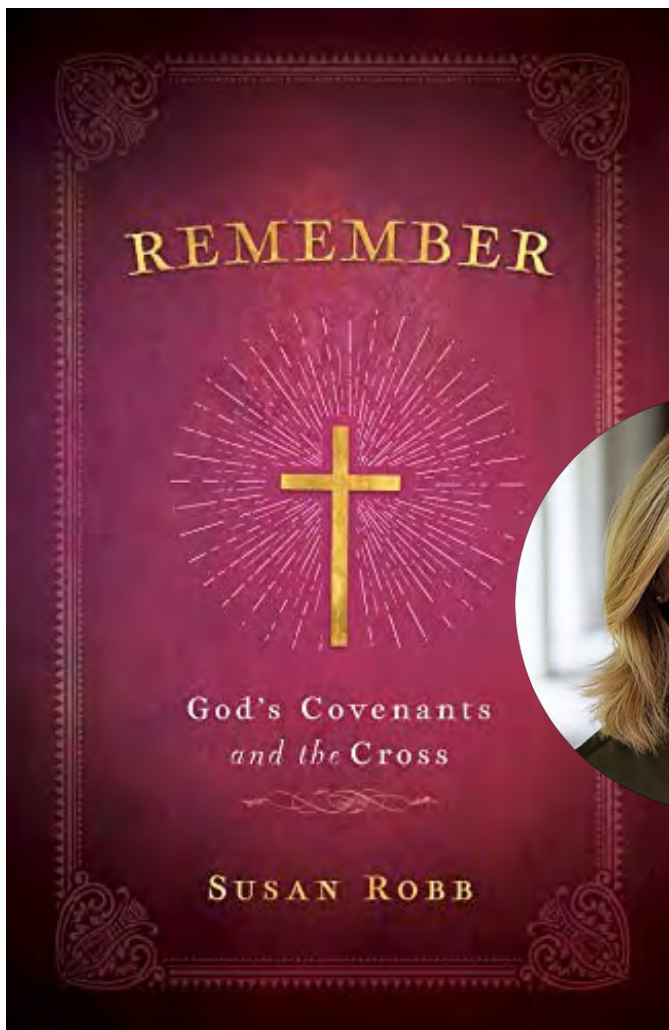
New Pathfinder's Class Lenten Study: Exploring God's Covenants and the Cross

The Pathfinders Sunday School Class has recently begun a Lenten study titled *Remember: The Covenants and the Cross* by Susan Robb.

Susan Robb is the senior associate minister at Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas, where she has been part of the church staff for 17 years. God's call to ministry led her to pursue a Master of Divinity degree at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. She graduated *magna cum laude* in 2006 with an award in homiletics. Susan's area of expertise lies in writing and teaching Bible studies and exploring the idea of listening to and responding to God's call.

God's covenants throughout the Old Testament reveal the character of God's promises to the people of Israel. In this study, we will examine God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, followed by the new covenant established on Maundy Thursday. The Lenten story culminates with an examination of the cross as another example of God's promise for a new world.

Susan Robb will help us learn more about the fundamental lessons of the covenants through a mixture of biblical history and personal stories. She will also provide a foundation for understanding God's promises throughout history and the role of Jesus's passion and crucifixion in the history of the covenants.



Susan Robb



High School Bible Study: Exploring Prayer in New Ways

Prayer is one of the most important ways we connect with God, but it doesn't look the same for everyone. Some people pray out loud, some journal, some sit in silence, and some pray through music, movement, or art. As we enter the season of Lent, our High School Bible Study group is beginning a special study on prayer—exploring different ways to deepen our conversations with God.

To help guide our study, our youth were given a list of various prayer practices and asked to choose the ones they were most interested in learning about. Based on their responses, we will spend the next few weeks exploring and practicing Art Prayers, Metta Prayers, and Ignatian Contemplation—three unique and meaningful ways to engage in prayer.

All youth are welcome to join us! If you or someone you know would be interested, we'd love to have you. Our group of about 10 meets weekly on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. at the Boones' house.

Come as you are, and join us as we journey through Lent with prayer!

Manna and Mercy with Rev. Alan Storey March 21–25, 2025

Join us for a transformative few days exploring scripture from Genesis to Revelation through the lens of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Rev. Alan Storey of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa will lead this journey, offering a fresh biblical worldview and tools for interpreting scripture's life-giving message.

Event Schedule:

Hayes Barton UMC

Friday, March 21 | 5:30–9:00 p.m.
Dinner and Teaching

Saturday, March 22 | 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. | Teaching
(includes light breakfast and boxed lunch) **Registration required.**

Cost: \$40 per attendee, \$15 for students (includes meals and materials) Scholarships available—contact Rev. Molly White at mwhite@hbumc.org.

Southeast Raleigh Table UMC

Sunday, March 23 | 2:00–5:00 p.m.

This event is free and requires no registration.

Benson Memorial UMC

Tuesday, March 25

7:00–9:00 p.m. | Discussion

Join Rev. Storey for a discussion on his upcoming book, *The bell, banners, and blasphemy*, about the Central Methodist Mission's bold stand for justice in Cape Town. **This event is free and requires no registration.**

***Don't miss
this opportunity to
deepen your faith and
engage with scripture
in a powerful way!***

The Story of
THE CHURCH

SPEAKER
REV. ALAN STOREY

Join us for an evening with Rev. Alan Storey of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. He will share from his book, *The bell, banners, and blasphemy*, exploring the Central Methodist Mission's bold stand for justice in Cape Town.

Tuesday, March 25, 2025 | 7:00–9:00 p.m.

FREE EVENT | NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED
Visit our website www.BensonMemorialUMC.org/Events/

About Rev. Alan Storey

Rooted in the South African context, Alan Storey is a gospel storyteller and a facilitator of personal and political change. Alan's commitment to the Jesus way of justice and peacemaking was tested early in his life when he faced conscription into the apartheid regime's military. He chose to be a conscientious objector. Arrested and put on trial, he faced a likely six-year prison sentence. However, his trial was abandoned midway, making him the last conscientious objector to be brought to trial in apartheid South Africa. Over the years, Alan has been involved in numerous civil society organizations addressing gun violence, racism, state-capture corruption, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, spatial apartheid inequality, sex worker discrimination, and the campaign for a universal basic income. He also spearheaded the transformation of the stipend policy within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Alan holds an honors degree in theology and a master's degree in the philosophy of applied business ethics. He is a recipient of the Rotary Paul Harris Fellowship Award and a fellow of the African Leadership Initiative, part of the Aspen Leadership Institute. [Learn more here.](#)



[\(complete church calendar is here\)](#)

Sunday, March 16

- 8:45 a.m., Worship Service
- 9:30 a.m., Outreach Team Meeting
- 9:45 a.m., Sunday School
- 11:00 a.m., Worship Service
- 11:00 a.m., Livestream Service
- 12:00 p.m., Chancel Chimes

Monday, March 17

- 1:30 p.m., Susanna Wesley Group
- 7:00 p.m., Trustees Meeting

Tuesday, March 18

- 2:00 p.m., Prayer Shawl Ministry

Wednesday, March 19

- 7:15 a.m., Coffee and Prayer
- 10:00 a.m., Reading Buddy Meeting
- 5:45 p.m., Wonderful Wednesday Fellowship Meal
- 6:45 p.m., Bible Study
- 7:00 p.m., High School Bible Study

Thursday, March 20

- 11:30 a.m., Adult Fellowship
- 5:00 p.m., Chancel Choir

Sunday, March 23

- 8:45 a.m., Worship Service
- 9:45 a.m., Sunday School
- 10:00 a.m., Finance Town Hall
- 11:00 a.m., Worship Service
- 11:00 a.m., Livestream Service
- 12:00 p.m., Chancel Chimes
- 2:00 p.m., Jack Crum Prophetic Ministry Conference

Monday, March 24

- 7:00 p.m., Church & Society

Tuesday, March 25

- 6:00 p.m., Anti-Racism Team Meeting
- 7:00 p.m., "The Story of the Church" with Alan Storey

Wednesday, March 26

- 9:30 a.m., Mom's Morning Meetup
- 5:45 p.m., Fellowship Meal
- 6:45 p.m., Bible Study
- 7:00 p.m., High School Bible Study

Thursday, March 27

- 10:00 a.m., Thursday Bible Study
- 5:00 p.m., Chancel Choir



Campus Cleanup Dates

Our spring workday schedule is as follows: **March 15, April 12, May 17, and June 21.** We plan to continue pruning shrubs and spreading mulch at the March and April work sessions. We start at 9:00 a.m. and finish around noon each Saturday. Mark your calendars and join us—the campus needs your attention!

The trustees have marked off the areas being considered for additional handicap walkways from the front parking lot into the sanctuary and the fellowship hall. Take a look and share your thoughts with any trustee.

FEMA Project Update

The upheaval continues in our federal government departments and agencies. The structure of our grant requires us to pay for the projects when completed and then request reimbursement from FEMA. Our FEMA grant team is moving forward steadily but cautiously to prevent a negative financial impact on the church. Watch for updates on the project.

**Jack Crum Conference
on Prophetic Ministry
Sunday, March 23
2:00 to 5:30 p.m.
in the Fellowship Hall**



Featured speakers for this conversation about Christian nationalism and faithful responses to it include Rev. Dr. Lester Ruth from Duke University, Rev. Dr. Jennifer Copeland, executive director of the NC Council of Churches, and Rev. Dr. Joey Shelton who has extensively written and taught on the topic.

Learn more about each speaker:

[Reverend Dr. Jennifer Copeland](#)
[Reverend Dr. Joey Shelton](#) | [Reverend Dr. Lester Ruth](#)

The Jack Crum Conference on Prophetic Ministry is an annual event sponsored by the Methodist Federation for Social Action's NC chapter. This year's conference is also co-sponsored by Benson Memorial's Church and Society Team. The conference is named for Rev. Jack Crum who was a tireless advocate for racial and social justice. He served as a pastor in North Carolina for 37 years.

We are asking for a minimum donation of \$10 and for students it is free. For registration and more information, check <https://www.mfsancc.org/>.



Easter Lily Order Form

As Ash Wednesday approaches next week, it is time to consider ordering Easter lilies to adorn the sanctuary for Easter Sunday services. These beautiful white lilies, available in 6.5-inch pots for \$12.50 per plant, can be ordered using the form provided here in *The Beacon* or on the welcome table in the narthex. The deadline for placing orders is Sunday, March 16. Those who purchase lilies may pick them up following the 11:00 a.m. Easter Sunday service. Any unclaimed lilies will be shared or planted in the Memory Garden.

Order deadline: Sunday, March 16

To order online, please use this [Easter lily order form](#) (also located on our website under [Member Resources](#)).

Who are the lilies from (names to be listed): _____

In memory of: _____

In honor of: _____

Number of plants: _____

Cost: \$12.50 each Total enclosed: _____

*Please mail to the church office: Benson Memorial UMC, 4706 Creedmoor Road, Raleigh, NC 27612
Make checks (marked "Easter Lilies") payable to Benson Memorial United Methodist Church.
Indicate on envelope of cash payments that it is for Easter Lily orders.*